As to the gross structure of the body, some persons learned about the skeleton when, in preparing corpses for cremation, the undertaker stripped the decaying flesh from the bones, usually in the presence of relatives and spectators of all ages. Occasional autopsies because of suspected sorcery, and surgical removal of a fetus from a deceased mother by caesarian section led to some knowledge of organs and blood vessels. Male and female masseurs of considerable competence were trained in the Chinese neuro-muscular system. A system of "origins," e.g. that the elbow-origin was in the arm pit, and the chest originated at the spine, might relate to the Chinese concept of linkage points on the body, in particular, acupuncture. In Bang Chan's popular conceptualization, the protecting skin which enclosed the body was thin at the top of the head and especially so at the stomach area. An old image also persisted that the body cavity itself was a relatively undivided space extending from neck to pelvis. Inside the cavity, food dropped from the top, faeces packed down at the bottom. Through the body curculated slowly the blood; several kinds of water (nām) (McF. 453) e.g., the nām khraw (refuse-water) (ibid. 453) in the abdomen; and several winds (lom) (ibid. 728) e.g., the pushing lom bēng (ibid. 487), and the pulling lom chawat (ibid. 287). The small hair-whorls noted on the head, hip, or shoulder were construed as minor vortices of these currents, or as souls (khwan).

Foremost in people's minds were the elemental constituents of the body. The human body, along with every animal, plant, or mineral in the world, was made up of 4 elements (thāt): earth, fire, water, and wind (air).[10] This ancient four-fold view, also familiar to the Greeks, had mixed in Bang Chan with the traditional five-element Chinese system (metal, earth, fire, water, wood) because gold, iron, and wood were also spoken of as constitutional elements, and there may have been others. Some persons said that the proportions of the 4 major elements were the same for everyone, others, that they varied for different temperaments, which were also affected by the presence or absence of elements other than the basic 4.

10. "The body, comprising about a bushel of powdery earth-element, is held together by half a bushel of juicy water-element, and propped up by the windy-element. The fiery element digests what is eaten or drunk and preserves the body". (Visuddhi-Magga. [Warren:157-158]).

All food was also made up of the 4 elements. Here rice was of particular importance. The body was seen as built and maintained by rice. Flesh in fact was rice, an image probably derived from Buddhist scriptures. 11

Each element carried with it its substantive aspect of heat, flowing, etc., and its astrological nature and relations. Elements could be compatible or incompatible with each other. Earth, water, wind, iron, and wood for instance were compatible. Gold "got along" with all elements. Fire, though, was incompatible with wind, water, and wood for it could destroy their proper proportion.

The effect of astral and planetary relationships at the moment of birth on one's constituent elements induced qualities of character.12 Mind and body were a continuum. Because family members were born at different moments of time, intrafamilial temperamental differences were expected.13 Persons made up of incompatible elements quarreled. Thus, friction might occur between parents and children. For a husband and wife, who lived in especially close proximity, the constitutional elements were of special importance. Through marital relationships their elements were in physical contact. Consequently, in the old days, a couple comtemplating marriage ascertained through their horoscopes the compatibility of their natal elements to determine whether they could live together without destroying each other. For instance, a girl with much fire in her make-up was easily angered and prone to fevers. She could not make a successful marriage with a boy with much wood.

Physiology

A single physiological process controlled the functioning of the body and the mind; i.e., the equilibrium of its elements. If the elements were in proper balance, proportion or harmony, a person was healthy; if an element were excessive or deficient,

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11. "This, my formed body, is composed of the 4 Elements, generated by Father and Mother, built up from rice, porridge and sour gruel," says the Buddha (Suriyabongse 1951:11).

12. Merit, the other determinant of character, is discussed in "Influences on Health" below.

13. Cf. the proverb "The joints (knots) on the same stem are nevertheless unequally spaced, so even brothers are of different minds," (Gerini 1904:14).

Diet in Body Maintenance and Curing

261 Because food created fire, the daily diet could be a
262 source of illness or a therapeutic means. Every food had
753 known properties for heating or cooling, and for other
effects as well. Guava fruit, alcohol, and turtle or cobra
curry were heating. Eggs were cooling. Depending on the
occasion, ice and iced concoctions were over-heating or
over-cooling. They were always "dangerous during
menstruation." Banana varied according to the variety:
kluai hom (fragrant banana) was undesirably cooling and
caused either diarrhea or constipation (Hauck, 1959:27);
kluai nam wa was less deleterious (salaeng) while kluai
nam was good for the sick or for parturients (Boonlong).

252 Properties in food changed in cooking. Boiling made
262 rice "ripe" (auk) and so available as nourishment (Anuman
Rajadhon:77). Even the method of cooking varied the
[758] properties. For the sick and for parturients, the banana
[846] variety called kluai hak muk was good if baked, but not if
cooked in syrup (Boonlong).

262 Some foods were "incompatible" with, and so aggravated,
753 certain illnesses. Air-borne food in the form of smell was
incompatible with, and compounded, a condition of wind
827 excess. Death or blindness ensued. On the other hand,
asafetida might be tied to the wrist of a new-born baby so
that the smell, an established carminative, might cure the
excess wind in his stomach manifested as flatulence.

262 Beneficial foods were encouraged. Of all these none
surpassed rice, the main sustenance of the body, "the only
true food" (Yong Chutima, in Hauck, 1959:27) and source of
"strength" to the farmer. Rice was a safe food. It never
disturbed elements. Eating rice, as compared with meat,
[774] had no overtone of taking life. One could eat one's fill
without any sin. Most of all, rice nourished the human
khwan, for each grain contained a part of the khwan of the
[782] divine Rice Mother. Furthermore, any food offered ritually
to a spirit or to make merit acquired strengthening proper-
ties, and was afterwards given to priests, children, or to
the sick.

Foods with known dangers were avoided. "Kluai tani
[776] banana, a variety full of seeds, was never eaten because
it contained a female ghost (phi)." Jackfruit was
avoided by lactating women as a direct source of wind-
excess. Fruit in general was not dangerous but "did not
give enough strength for a rice farmer. It was all right
for an orchardist."

Now that the fire was going nicely and Dūan was "ready to warm her body," the all-important prayer and incantation "to control the hotness and poison" of the fire had to be pronounced lest the mother's body be "swollen or burned." Sāi took raw rice, salt, and alcoholic liquor[36] in her mouth, chewed them, and sprayed them over the fire and over Dūan's body three times, saying "Spirit of the Fire and Wind, may both mother and baby be cool and happy!" and murmuring her secret formula with ancient Pali words about "great fire" and "death."[37] With the shoulder cloth (sabaithiang) that she always wore to the temple draped diagonally over her left shoulder and under her right arm, Dūan knelt and faced the fire. Praying for happiness to the Mothers of the Fire, Fire-floor, and Wind, and finally to the Lord Buddha, the Holy Brotherhood of Priests, and the Sacred Law, she bowed, hands clasped, and touched the floor three times with her forehead. Then she rose and lay down on the plank with the holy fire on her right side.

As Dūan was resting quietly, Sāi made three "taping fruits" (lūk prakhop), balls of tamarind leaves, phlai, and salt wrapped in cloth. One was put well up between Dūan's legs to cure the birth wound (phlāe). The other two were set aside for use on subsequent days. Sāi painted the baby's tongue with alcoholic medicine, and from her fingers dropped a little honey and boiled water into his mouth. Then she laid him on his tray on the floor close by Dūan, on the side away from the fire.

With satisfaction of a job well done, Sāi and Lek sat together for a quiet chew of betel. "Lek," said Sāi, "has it occurred to you on what a good day this boy has been born? It is a Saturday, so he will have power. Nothing, nobody, can hurt him! Once I delivered a boy on that day

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36. Alcohol was heating; rice, strengthening. Salt appears to be drying.

37. The deities addressed were māe phra phlōeng and māe phra phāi. Another Pali-Thai magic formula to control fire was: "Phra Mōk Khan Lā Nō will extinguish the fire from hell, na mō phut tha ya." Phra Mogdallana, one of the two most faithful disciples of Buddha, caused the fires of hell to go out (cf. Anuman Rajadhon 1961:137). The na mō...etc. was a traditional phrase to prevent spiritual dangers and is a repetition of the names of the Buddha in five incarnations, past and future (cf. Textor 1960:483-485).

date of all, Sao Hā Day, one Saturday in April, which was the fifth day of the waxing moon of the fifth month, in the year of the Big Snake. That boy is truly blessed. He will be the best and most respected doctor or teacher. He is in school now and people are always telling him he is bright. Chāi came on a Monday, so he'll be charming, but, alas, always roaming away from home! This new little son has his mother's features, which is as desirable as a daughter's having her father's features. Still, no one knows what characteristics come from a parent. One more thing, Dūan. Now you may take medicine as you please." Shortly after, Sāi took leave until the next day.

The new mother turned her face toward the fire and tried to sleep. It was night. Lek was close by, and Song slept in his mosquito net near Chāi's cradle. The fire was so hot it kept waking Dūan. Though the smoke made her eyes smart it kept the mosquitoes away. In spite of the discomfort, Dūan was eager to have the fire as hot as she could stand it, for this heat and that of the medicine would dry her uterus, rid her of the bad blood and waters of childbirth, restore her strength and stimulate her milk. She forced herself to drink as much hot boiled water as possible to keep out the dreaded wind element that might get into her body and cool her. When, however, the fire was overpowering, she dripped water from a handy jar with a cloth.

The next day, Sāi returned. With warm, boiled water she bathed Dūan--this time the upper part of her body also--and the baby. The boiled water was much more important for the mother, but being available, was used for the baby, too. Sāi washed the soiled clothing and the baby's little cloths. Turmeric was again painted on both Dūan's and the baby's abdomen, head, and neck to protect from wind. Sāi questioned and examined Dūan. Measuring a handspan down from Duan's groin, she pressed outward gently. "I want to see if these particular ligaments on the thigh are joined. They are often damaged and do not heal if the time by the fire is too short. Some mothers cannot walk at all. They have to call a masseur for regular treatment." To "make the ligaments well," she tapped Duan's body all over with the second of the tapping-fruit balls and had her sit on one while bathing. She massaged the muscles, stiff from lying quietly near the fire, by pressing in the ball with her hands and even feet. Medicinal herbs were warmed and laid on Dūan's breasts so that the "useless early milk [colostrum] which would give diarrhea" could be worked out and thrown away. "The real milk is not ready for the baby until the third day," Sāi said, "but if the baby is crying much, and if there is milk some mothers start nursing on the second day."

Almost from the moment of his birth, whenever the baby

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Even after the child was out, the pile of wood was still a drying womb to be treated carefully. It was also the wood for a consecrated fire. To drop a piece of this wood carelessly both injured and desecrated. If this happened a disease of the eyes "sang," came at once for which no male medical powers had any remedy. The only cure was in women's hands, that essence of maternity, "a drop of mother's milk--any mother's." The larger implications of this linking of fire and maternity are dealt with in the next section.

The Fire of Maturity

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In the events surrounding the birth of the child, the significant step for the woman personally was the post-partum rest period by the fire (yū fai). Far more was at stake than just drying the uterus. The fire rest was one of the series of rites of the life-cycle which marked the course of an individual from birth to death. The others were the cutting of the umbilical cord, first head shaving, top-knot tonsure, ordination (for men), marriage, and cremation. Through the consecrated fire a woman formally achieved full maturity: she became suk (cooked, ripe, mature). Maturity did not come just by bearing a child. The fire brought about the transformation.[46] [885]

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How was mature womanhood viewed? What was the essential female role and office? Bang Chan saw a woman as one who "feeds and lengthens lives." As the custodian of growth she was, first, the guardian of the vital, essential khwan soul, and especially of the immature, flighty khwan of growing persons. [774]

Secondly, a woman was a donor of nourishment (liang).[47] Her primary responsibility was to nurture children and other tender beings. She nourished the fetus with her blood. After [827]

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46. "The fiery element digests what is eaten or drunk...and cooks the body and gives it its beauty of complexion. And the body thus cooked is kept free from decay" (Warren:157-158).

47. All the deities "concerned with the welfare of our bodies and our khwan" were maternal (Mae), e.g. Rice, Water, Earth, "Mother-Goddess" (Mae Sū), and several Mother-Princesses (Chao Mae). Fire, and maybe wind, were both female (mae) and male (phra) (Textor:485). To these deities, "higher" than ordinary spirits, Bang Chan "owed more." [776]

delivery, "her blood was purified to a white color to become the milk of the breast."[48] Nursing a child was the essence of a woman's function, the supremely feminine act. A priest said, "A mother mercifully receives the khwan into her womb, and for maintaining life gives more of her own body, strength, and care (i.e. than does the father). Mothers are born to love children. Theirs is a steady intent to provide children with successful existences. To a mother one is most grateful" (S.S.).

In a wider context, not only all their household members but people anywhere were the objects of women's nurture: women were in charge of the cooking even if occasionally helped by men. At the meals they prepared they were often the last to eat, so often "holding back and eating whatever was left over," that in a poor houshold, short rationing daily was probable (Hauck, et al.:35,49). One old lady expressed deep satisfaction that she "did not feel hungry any more." She construed this as proof that she had ample merit, but it also meant that she was a great donor who gave continuously and took little. Women usually offered the early morning food to priests in behalf of the family, and they took charge of cooking the immense amount of food served at large ceremonies and temple festivities. When age pushed women past their mature capacities, they returned to the status of recipients. A son said of his senile mother, "She has gone back to being a child" (klap pai pen dek). The son's wife cooked delicacies for her.

A desire to give tender care and nourishment was deemed inborn in all women. Although sex was not strongly differentiated in babyhood,[49] by age 3 a hard-to-handle skirt was put on a tiny girl, who reacted with vast pride. By 5, girls were helping with cooking and baby tending. Often has an older sister of 9 or 12 been observed patiently feeding her charge the ice cream she longed to eat herself.

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48. This very phrase was congruent with the colors associated with the khwan. Red or white flags, or pieces of cloth, or puddings (khanom) were required wherever khwan were involved, such as in rice, san phra phūm, and tham khwan ceremonies. Red was an auspicious color, white symbolized innocence and purity.

49. Anuman Rajadhon reports, though, that at the moment of birth, the child's sex was immediately "adjusted" (Anuman Rajadhon:127).

In addition, strengthening foods like rice and fish, the staples for stout farmers, were stressed. Fruit, "which gave no strength," and vegetables (except for the nursing curry mentioned below) were avoided.

The holy fire also transformed a woman into a better nourisher. It gave her new, lasting beneficial nursing habits. As one man explained, "the very nature of water is changed by boiling over a fire. It becomes suk (ripe)." Similarly, a woman's body, her very nature, was permanently changed to suk by the fire's heating. The fire, in fact, made suk all the food she ate beside it. Since this food was turned into milk, her breast milk became suk and so more nourishing, and did not disturb elements.[52] "Food eaten while lying by the fire, when eaten later on (during lactation) by the mother, does not cause diarrhea in the baby." Jackfruit ordinarily caused wind-trouble during lactation, but one woman ate it during the fire-rest, and at once "got used to it, so she could eat it all the time." To make themselves better nourishers, some women spoke of the desirability of "eating a bit of every kind of food." The "nursing curry" (kaeng lIang) was a mixture of vegetables.

Finally, the consecrated fire strengthened a woman's own khwan. She could better withstand convulsion if attacked by a spirit.[53] She was able thereby to handle a khwan even without the special magic that existed for it.

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52. To be nourishing even the daily rice had to be made suk by boiling (Anuman Rajadhon:77). It may be that no food was considered nourishing unless suk, either naturally (like ripe fruit) or by cooking.

53. "...when 'involuntarily' entered by ghosts...maidens in the 17-25 age bracket tend to convulse more violently than do women of more advanced years"(Textor:406). "Maidens" were presumably not married and so not suk.

Chapter VIII

CHANGES

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[162] In studying change in the customs surrounding childbirth in Bang Chan, we have D.B. Bradley's description of birth in Bankok in 1865 as a base-line on which to project our findings. Since most of the population of Bang Chan (Thai, with a few Laotians, Mon, Muslims, and Chinese) stems from Bangkok, we may reasonably assume that the parallels derive from a true historical connection. Bradley's description fitted Bang Chan as if written today:

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> "Siamese theory in regard to the part which external and internal fire plays in the functions of life and health is made to work powerfully...There is, at such times, a diminution of heat in the body, and consequent liability to stagnation of the blood, which, if not guarded against by fire, will leave the uterus flabby and enlarged, bad humors in circulation, a consequent weak state of the stomach, resulting in the secretion of too little milk, and that of a bad quality for the child, all of which will be likely to be followed by a host of other fearful maladies to both mother and child...[Thus a woman lies by the fire]... exposing all parts of her body, and more particularly her abdomen, to that drying process, so that the uterus shall be forced to shrink up quickly to its normal dimensions, and the sanguineous streams which had been diverted to support the child before birth, shall, by fire, be driven backward to their more usual limitations, all which is...a sine qua non to a sound constitution and good health in the future..." (Bangkok Calendar, 1865:78-84).

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757 Bradley showed that some behavior one might call "change" today was a recognized alternative in 1865. For instance, in Bang Chan a few women "are made too unhappy (klum) by the fire so cannot use it. They should take extra amounts of pickled medicine" (yā dong). Bradley wrote, "a few delicate females...who cannot endure [this] usual treatment, are compelled, against all their ...fears of the consequences, and all the importunities of their